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ABSTRACT

This document is a two-part workshop resource manual intended to help trainers of literacy tutors and others to raise awareness of the particular needs of older adult literacy learners. Part 1 contains basic information on the topic of older adult literacy obtained from a review of the most current literature available and has a Canadian and, especially, Saskatchewan emphasis. An introduction is followed by an overview of literacy among Saskatchewan older adults, including a definition of literacy, statistics, and implications of low literacy. Other sections focus on the following topics: selected historical perspectives on seniors' literacy problems; barriers to improving literacy skills, such as social-political, self-perception, physical, program conditions, and cultural; motivation for increasing literacy skills; reaching the older adult literacy learner; and learning characteristics of older adults. A final section on adapting program design and materials to the needs of older adults addresses adaptations to overcome barriers, adaptations to capitalize on interests, and adaptations in teaching older adults. A summary is followed by a list of 13 references and description of the Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project. Part 2, the workshop guide, includes facilitator notes that cover the same topics as part 1, but they are abbreviated for facilitators to use as notes when conducting a workshop. Appendixes include the following: a workshop outline, additional workshop options, getting acquainted exercises, group activities, and a listing of Saskatchewan literacy programs and literacy resource centers throughout Canada. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers are provided for these program resources. (YLB)

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Seniors' Education Centre

OLDER ADULT LITERACY RESOURCE MANUAL

PART ONE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

PART TWO: WORKSHOP GUIDE

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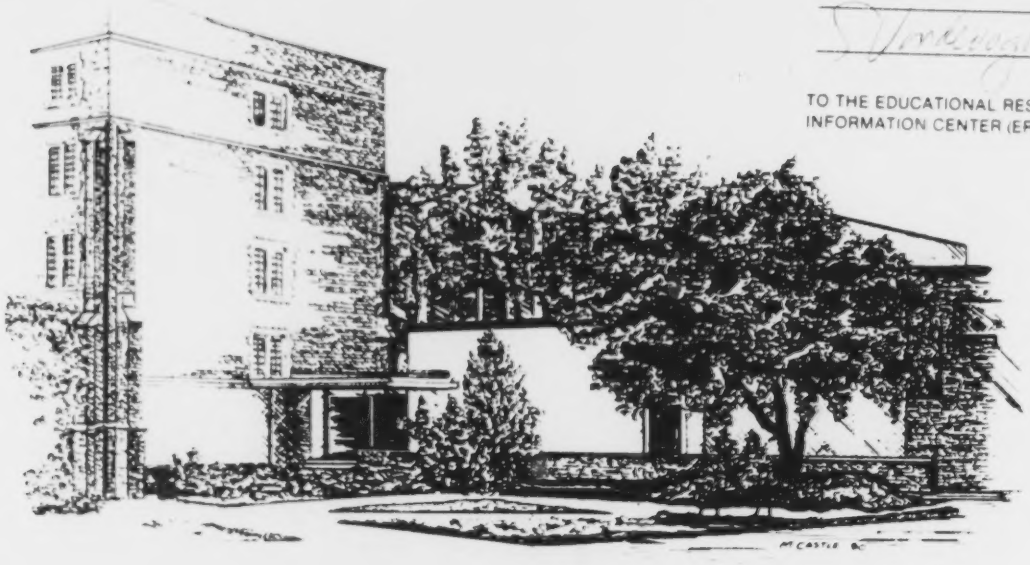

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OLDER ADULT LITERACY RESOURCE MANUAL

PART ONE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

Basic information for trainers of literacy tutors and others interested in older adult literacy

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February 14, 1995

OLDER ADULT LITERACY PROJECT
SENIORS' EDUCATION CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

OLDER ADULT LITERACY RESOURCE MANUAL

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PART ONE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES				
a. How To Use This Resource Manual				
b. Introduction				
c. An Overview Of Literacy Among Saskatchewan Older Adults				
d. Selected Historical Perspectives on Seniors' Literacy Problems				
e. Barriers To Improving Literacy Skills				
f. Motivation For Increasing Literacy Skills				
g. Reaching The Older Adult Literacy Learner				
h. Learning Characteristics Of Older Adults				
i. Adapting Program Design And Materials To The Needs Of Older Adults				
j. Summary				
k. Reference List				
l. Appendices				
PART TWO: WORKSHOP GUIDE				
a. How To Use This Resource Manual				
b. Facilitator Notes				
c. Appendices				

THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSE

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Writing a document of this magnitude and with so little research and literature to rely on is a challenging undertaking. I was fortunate, however, to receive the positive feedback and encouragement of the Older Adult Literacy Project focus group members. Older adults and literacy practitioners from various parts of Saskatchewan critiqued and evaluated this resource as well as other project material. Norma Wallace, Dr. Lester Bates, Lynda Blach, Jeanette Dean, Margaret Dodson, Nayda Veeman, Debbie Purton, Doreen Anderson, and Geraldine Rediron were the focus group members instrumental in helping to shape this manual.

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Finally, I wish to thank the Literacy Volunteers of America for their permission to use segments of the training resource entitled "I Can Read...At Last". Their experience and material has only served to enhance this resource manual.

Darla Goettler, Project Coordinator
Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project

RESOURCE MANUAL DEVELOPERS

Older adults are a diverse group of individuals with a wide range of life experiences. Their cultural heritage and geographical location adds to the variety. In Saskatchewan, the contrasting experiences of rural and urban seniors, aboriginals and recent immigrants, and northern and southern older adults have a direct impact on their literacy ability. To respect this diversity and show its effect on literacy and the ability to improve skills, information pertaining specifically to aboriginal and newly-arrived immigrant older adults has been included in the manual by people working in the field.

GERALDINE REDIRON, Literacy Facilitator for Northlands College, used her experience working with aboriginal communities in Northern Saskatchewan to write about the literacy needs of older aboriginal people. **JEANETTE DEAN**, ESL instructor for the Saskatoon Open Door Society, used her knowledge of the literacy needs of newly-arrived immigrant seniors to explain the impact of poor English literacy on the lives of this group. **DARLA GOETTLER**, Coordinator of the Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project, researched and wrote the remaining material, and arranged for overall production, printing, and distribution on behalf of the Seniors' Education Centre.

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HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE MANUAL

This document is **PART ONE** of a two-part workshop resource manual intended to help trainers of literacy tutors, and others, to raise awareness of the particular needs of older adult literacy learners. Part One contains basic information on the topic of older adult literacy. Part Two is a workshop guide. Both parts of the manual will help workshop facilitators plan and implement workshops for a diverse group of learners, such as literacy tutors, older adults, adult educators, and others who work with seniors. The manual may also be a useful tool for those interested in incorporating an older adult literacy component into basic adult literacy programs.

Part One material is a review of the most current literature available and has a Canadian and, especially, Saskatchewan emphasis. To capture some of the diversity of Saskatchewan older adults and their needs, information on aboriginal and newly-arrived immigrant seniors has been included. The material could be used in a workshop or simply read for information. Part One is a stand-alone document.

Part Two, the workshop guide, includes facilitator notes which cover the same topics as the basic information, but are abbreviated for facilitators to use as notes when conducting a workshop. The workshop guide can not be used as a stand-alone document. Please read Part One of the manual first, then Part Two if you want to organize a workshop on the issues discussed in these materials.

An appendix to Part One material provides detailed information on the Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project. The workshop guide appendices in Part Two provide supporting materials: a workshop outline, additional workshop options, getting acquainted exercises, group activity suggestions, a sample participant evaluation form, and a list of other resources.

This manual is not intended to teach literacy volunteers how to tutor older adults. It is an awareness-raising and information resource designed to sensitize tutors to the special needs and difficulties seniors face when seeking instruction. The information will help tutors to be more effective and supportive of their learner's unique circumstances. It is hoped that this resource manual will increase public awareness, training, and resource and program development in the area of older adult literacy.

Definitions:

The terms **older adults** and **seniors** are used interchangeably throughout the text and refer to persons 55 years of age and older.

The term **aboriginal** is used in this text in the same way as it is in the Canadian Constitution to include Treaty Indian, Metis, and Inuit people. Please note, however, that this definition is not a self-definition of the people named and is not necessarily acceptable to the people who are included in the definition.

PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

"The fundamental human right to be independent and able to participate in a literate culture is important for all people throughout their life span and particularly important for older adults who are trying to maintain their independence." (Williamson, 1991, p. 36)

It is widely recognized that basic literacy skills are essential to full participation in today's Canadian society. It is also acknowledged that the ability to read and write is a fundamental human right, regardless of age, gender, income, racial, or ethnic origin. Despite these well-accepted truths, a large percentage of older adults are unable to read, write, and calculate at a level which allows active participation in the community. This situation demands resources and programs to help raise the level and understanding of older adult literacy.

Older adults need to be literate to maintain their personal safety, independence, and self-esteem. As people age they may face a number of related problems, such as ill health, disability, or declining income. These conditions are problematic for a person who cannot read and understand medication labels, manage a tight budget, access community and health services, and deal with emergencies. The high cost of illiteracy is clear.

In terms of public funds, fostering independent lifestyles and increasing a sense of self-worth among older adults is far more cost-effective goals, in

the long run, than, for example, placing individuals in special care homes. Literacy programs, designed in partnership with older adults, could be part of the overall movement to encourage independent lifestyles for a sector of older adults who may be vulnerable to poor health, isolation, poverty and, eventually, the need for special care homes.

Literacy programs throughout Saskatchewan have been successful in meeting the needs of a diverse population of learners who vary in age, gender, cultural heritage, income levels, and geographical location. To date, however, little progress has been made in terms of exploring the literacy learning needs of older adults with poor or no reading and writing ability (Mullan, 1992, p. 15). Work in this area needs to be done in order to empower older adults to gain their right to literacy and, through it, improved health and independence.

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERACY AMONG SASKATCHEWAN OLDER ADULTS

DEFINITION

The term literacy has been defined in various ways, from grade attainment to functional skills. Current definitions favour the ability to adequately perform skills required for daily activities. These skills generally involve reading, writing, and numeracy. In the *Statistics Canada Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities*, literacy was defined as "the information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community" (One Voice, 1991, p. 9). Hindle (1989) equates functional literacy with Grades 5 to 8 reading and writing skill levels. These levels may be adequate for completing simple forms and reading tasks but are not adequate for effective everyday functioning in our society and may not allow individuals to understand what they need to know (Hindle, 1989, p. 8).

In Hindle's (1989) study of literacy learning and adult literacy programs in Saskatchewan, adults age 65 and over represented the largest percentage of the population who have not attended school beyond the Grade 8 level. Since educational attainment and levels of literacy skills often coincide, it can be stated that low levels of literacy are higher among older adults than among the general population.

STATISTICS

The results in the *Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities* support this observation. This 1989 survey by Statistics Canada found that 65% of Canadians ages 55 to 69 experience some degree of difficulty meeting everyday reading demands (One Voice, 1991, p. 10). This percentage breaks down to "...29% of older adults who can handle simple reading tasks but who tend to avoid situations requiring reading, 21% who can use printed materials for only limited purposes, and 15% who identify themselves as people who cannot read" (One Voice, 1991, p. 10). This translated into about **one in three Saskatchewan older adults** who have difficulty reading the instructions on a bottle of cough syrup, looking up a telephone number in an emergency, or figuring out a bus route on a city map. The survey did not measure those age 70 and over, but it is likely their skills are similar or worse (One Voice, 1991, p. 10).

When other sub-groups, such as aboriginal older adults, are examined, the statistics are even more devastating. The *Study of the Unmet Needs of Off-Reserve Indian and Metis Elderly in Saskatchewan* states:

> In 1981, 61% of Saskatchewan seniors (65+) had less than a Grade 9 education. In comparison, 72% of the total sample of native elderly in the south, age 50 and over, have less than Grade 9. In the north, 93% of the total sample of native elderly have no formal education beyond the elementary level (Sask. Senior Citizens' Provincial Council, 1988, p. 37).

The statistics indicate that a large percentage of older adults could benefit by entering a literacy program to improve their skills; however, Saskatchewan program participation rates do not reflect this fact. A 1992

survey conducted by Diane Mullan, Seniors' Education Centre, University of Regina, estimated that less than 10% of approximately 2100 learners enrolled in Saskatchewan literacy programs in the 1991-92 academic year were 55 years of age or older (Mullan, 1992, p. 4). The majority of these older adults learners (69%) were between the ages 55-60. Fifteen percent were between the ages 61-64; 12% were between the ages 65-69; and only 4% were between the ages 70-74 (Mullan, 1992, p. 5).

Seventy-five percent of the 177 older adult learners in this survey had a formal education of Grade 8 or less (Mullan, 1992, p. 5). The majority could be classified as low- to middle-income, with an equal distribution between urban centres, towns, and rural areas (Mullan, 1992, p. 5). The majority were Canadian-born or English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Most of these ESL learners were not recent immigrants; they had been unable to acquire good English skills when they first arrived in Canada 30 or more years ago. Aboriginal older adults represented the smallest segment -- approximately 17% -- of the 177 older adult literacy registrants (Mullan, 1992, p. 6).

IMPLICATIONS

The pervasiveness of low literacy skills among older adults, and their equally low enrolment in Saskatchewan literacy programs, has serious implications.

Many seniors with low literacy levels, who have managed with varying degrees of success throughout their lives, find it increasingly difficult to

cope. Society is becoming more information-oriented and complex. Support systems provided by family and friends may have disappeared because they died or moved to another community. This leaves seniors with low levels of literacy isolated, and unable to manage their own affairs and remain active in their community. The long-term effect of low literacy among older adults is a decreasing quality of life.

Older adults need to know how to read and write well enough to fill out forms, write cheques, and deal with their personal and financial affairs. Seniors with low literacy skills may feel extremely isolated from their community and find it increasingly difficult to cope. Basic information, such as bus schedules and pamphlets advertising community and health services, may be difficult to understand and thus the services are virtually inaccessible.

Seniors with low literacy levels also have a higher risk of health problems (Williamson, 1991, p. 28). Isolated elderly persons with visual or auditory impairment and few literacy skills may misunderstand medical and dietary instructions. Medication misuse, errors, and compliance problems resulting in illness become more probable.

Seniors with poor literacy skills often find themselves at the bottom of the economic scale. "While the average income for literate adults 55 and over is $20,700, it is only $11,500 for nonliterate in the same age bracket" (Lothian & Jones, 1991, p. 5). Furthermore, economically disadvantaged seniors have fewer resources such as employment opportunities, income investments and savings, etc. to improve their situation.

The exclusion of older adults from access to the information they need to function well in their everyday lives is harmful. Seniors who have poor literacy skills are more likely to be misinformed, exploited, and isolated than others who have higher degrees of literacy. They are at risk of losing their independence and the quality of life they deserve.

The implications for aboriginal and immigrant seniors with poor literacy skills are even more distressing. These seniors are especially vulnerable to misinformation and increased isolation because of language and cultural barriers and racism.

A good percentage of aboriginal older adults live alone and rely on their children to read and write for them. When their children are not available or have poor literacy skills themselves, medication labels can not be read, bills go unpaid, and programs and services are not accessed. These older adults become removed from the community. Language and cultural barriers, racism, and often geographical isolation combined with low levels of literacy alienate many aboriginal older people from their roles as leaders in their communities.

Immigrant older adults must adjust to the ways of a new country and a new language. Many experience considerable loneliness and depression because of their inability to speak English (Dean & Klymyshyn, 1993, p. 1). They have left a home, friends and a settled way of life in their native country to become completely dependent on their children. Without English literacy skills they have little feeling of independence and self-worth.

Although the Government of Canada offers free English classes for a period of time, many immigrant older adults do not take advantage of them because they want to help their children by babysitting or working. Sometimes their children feel such classes would be a burden for their parents and do not encourage them to participate. Consequently they become increasingly dependent and isolated.

SELECTED HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SENIORS' LITERACY PROBLEMS

Low literacy levels among Saskatchewan older adults has its historical roots in the lack of educational opportunities. Today's seniors grew up at a time when the opportunity to participate in formal education was disturbed by two world wars and a global economic depression. The Depression created a need to strive for economic survival. The focus of many families was on sustaining a living, not obtaining an education.

The Saskatchewan economy was dominated by a rural agricultural base which helped to dictate the level of educational attainment. Children were often expected to leave school to work on the farm when needed (One Voice, 1990, p. 4). This led to interrupted and fragmented schooling. When children were old enough, many chose to work exclusively on the family farm and removed themselves from formal education entirely. Others took whatever employment they could find to supplement the family income.

The war effort also took many children away from school. While adult men and women left their homes to serve their country, school-aged children were often expected to help out on the family farm, especially at seeding and harvest time (Williamson, 1991, p. 20).

The tight economic conditions of the early 1900's had a profound effect on educational development. The Depression brought drought, poverty, and school closures. Many school districts were too poor to build their own

schools, or had an inferior building staffed with inadequately prepared teachers (Hindle, 1989, p. 46). The realities of many Saskatchewan rural areas, such as long distances between farms, harsh weather conditions, and roads which were often impassable in the winter, led to a declining student population and prolonged periods of school closures (Hindle, 1989, p. 46). Due to so many difficulties many schools remained closed.

Quality teacher training and a commitment to education was not a priority during the Depression and the war years (Hindle, 1989). The world wars also took the teachers away from the classroom. Untrained individuals who were willing to teach were recruited and assigned a school (Williamson, 1991, p. 19). Teaching in rural Saskatchewan was an undesirable assignment for any teacher. Many regions were financially unable to support a vibrant school or offer teachers an attractive salary. The harsh climate, isolation, and poverty of the period resulted in few teachers choosing assignments in rural Saskatchewan or remaining for any length of time.

Government and church policies were obstacles to the acquisition of education by aboriginal children who were usually required to leave home to live at a church-run residential school (Sask. Senior Citizens' Prov. Council, 1988, p. 40). The residential schools were strict, religious, and stressed assimilation into the dominant culture. As was the pattern of the day, school educators taught the girls to cook and clean, and the boys to farm. By 1913 the policy of "English only" in Saskatchewan schools was implemented to hasten assimilation of aboriginal and immigrant youth (Hindle, 1989, p. 46). Speaking an aboriginal language or practising any

aspect of their culture was met with harsh corporal punishment. This "English only" policy may have contributed to the fact that many older aboriginal people are not literate in either their own language or English. Such policies isolated many young people from the influences of their family, community, and culture and substantially hampered the learning environment.

Schools and learning became associated with loneliness and separation from family, values, traditions and language. As a result, many aboriginal families did not send their children to school. A number of children who did attend school encountered so many negative experiences that they suffered permanent damage to their self-esteem.

The family and economic circumstances of aboriginal people also had a direct impact on educational attainment. Northern native older people spent much of their youth learning hunting, trapping, and fishing skills with their families. These traditional forms of employment kept families away from town for weeks or months at a time, limiting the amount of time children could spend in formal school (Sask. Senior Citizens' Prov. Council, 1988, p. 39). If native families stayed close to the village, the father had to choose between unemployment or periods of absence from his family (Sask. Senior Citizens' Provincial Council, 1988, p. 39). Both were unacceptable. Family ties and economic survival took precedence over education.

Immigrant children also experienced educational barriers. Immigration levels were high in the early 1900's, and these new Canadians, whose first language was usually not English, may not have been literate even in their

mother tongue. The isolation and uncertainty of a new country and the language barriers, combined with the problems of rural education at that time, were not favourable conditions for learning to read and write (Williamson, 1991, p. 20). Hindle also states:

> For many immigrant children, school was not a very comfortable place. They were often teased and ostracized for their clothing and were forbidden to speak the native languages. Many were desperately poor and lacked warm clothing for the long trek to school (Hindle, 1989, p. 48).

In addition to the limited early education received by many older adults, it must also be mentioned that an individual's reading and writing ability may regress through lack of use. As Williamson states: "If an adult, after completing school, spends the next 20 to 40 years raising a family, working on the farm as a labourer, or in a factory where literacy skills are not required, reading and writing skills may have declined (1991, p. 20)."

Due to these factors, many people born before 1939, who are now 55 years of age and older, missed opportunities for formal learning in their childhood and early adulthood. The economic, political, and social factors of the era shaped the availability and accessibility of education. Today, many of these people - who are now older adults - are still confronted with the lack of opportunity to learn and improve their literacy skills.

BARRIERS TO IMPROVING LITERACY SKILLS

Lack of opportunity to learn and acquire literacy skills is a prevailing theme in the lives of many of today's older adults. As a large percentage of Saskatchewan older adults have a low literacy level, we might expect many of these seniors to participate in existing literacy programs. However, as Rutherford (1989) states: "The rate of participation of older adults in literacy programs is not consistent with the great number we know to have literacy problems" (p. 13). It must be concluded that barriers exist to participation in available programs.

The barriers experienced by older adults can be identified as: social-political, self-perception, physical, program conditions, and cultural.

SOCIAL-POLITICAL BARRIERS

The main barrier to improvement of literacy skills among older adults is the low priority literacy training for seniors given by governments and our society. Because older adults are not viewed as productive members of their community, spending time and money to teach them how to read and write is not considered important (Mullan, 1992, p. 10). Such ageist attitudes are also reflected in the prevailing myth that seniors are too old to learn new things. This myth is still used as justification for not funding seniors' education and leads to much debate about why we should teach older adults to read.

Being unable to read or write carries a significant degree of social stigma. Society tends to blame individuals for their literacy difficulties rather than understanding the historical and situational aspects. By admitting their difficulties, older adults expose themselves to the scrutiny of others. Society needs to help older adults alleviate the stigma and embarrassment associated with being unable to read and write. This can be accomplished by understanding seniors' lack of opportunities for education, by telling them we understand, and by respecting the complex survival skills these people have developed over the years (Williamson, 1991, p. 27). By altering our belief systems and social policies, substantial barriers to older adults improving their literacy skills would be eliminated.

SELF-PERCEPTION BARRIERS

Negative attitudes toward self and the ability to learn are other significant barriers. The belief that "I'm too old to learn," combined with low self-esteem and fear of failure, prevents many seniors from entering a literacy program (Mullan, 1992, p. 9).

The emotional fears associated with previous school experiences also contribute to non-participation. Childhood memories which still cause feelings of dissatisfaction, hatred, and loathing often create too much anxiety for the individual to confront (Williamson, 1991, p. 27). Some older adults seeking literacy instruction may dread that the rigid, authoritarian, often demeaning school environment has not changed over the years -- an experience they do not want to relive.

PHYSICAL BARRIERS

The changing physical difficulties of older adults such as declining vision, hearing loss, and mobility problems can be barriers to participation. Lack of transportation, especially in Saskatchewan's rural and northern areas, prevents many older adults from participating in literacy programs (Mullan, 1992, p. 10). Program locations need to be serviced by some form of public transportation. Wheelchair accessibility and adequate lighting also begin to meet some of the needs of older learners. Accessibility and the environment should be addressed in terms of these physical needs (Williamson, 1991, p. 25).

PROGRAM BARRIERS

Program conditions such as duration, frequency, and timing of literacy instruction may also act as deterrents if not suitable to the older adult. As Rutherford (1989) states; "The most frequent reason illiterate older adults cite for why they do not attend programs, is that they do not want to go out at night or do not like the program scheduling" (p. 14). Morning classes lasting thirty to sixty minutes, two to three times per week, seem to suit the learning needs of seniors, and aid in language acquisition (Williamson, 1991, p. 25). For newly-arrived immigrant older adults, part-time ESL instruction is preferred because students generally feel they can only absorb three hours at a time of learning English (Dean & Klymyshyn, 1993, p. 3). For immigrant and aboriginal older adults, childcare responsibility for their grandchildren can become a barrier to attending a literacy program or

receiving tutoring. Literacy programs that offer on-site childcare for grandchildren would facilitate participation of older adults who often have total or partial caregiving responsibility.

The material frequently used in literacy programs is not sensitive to seniors who have visual or auditory impairment. Print material is often too small to read easily and audio resources are not clear and loud enough. Literacy instruction with the aid of a computer may be difficult for some older adults to read, and fear of technology may act as an additional deterrent.

A further program barrier is the way in which current literacy programs are depicted in brochures and in the media. Literacy advertising primarily features younger people and often focuses on developing literacy skills for employment (Mullan, 1992, p. 10). This type of promotion reinforces the belief held by some older adults that literacy programs are not accessible to them.

CULTURAL BARRIERS

In general, literacy programs for older adults do not take into consideration the range of ethnic backgrounds, geographic locations, and cultural differences. The older adult population is a diverse group with varying education, experiences, and histories. Programs need to reflect these variations and be geared to the unique life circumstances of different cultural groups. Programs for aboriginal and immigrant seniors need to be culturally sensitive in order to eliminate possible additional barriers.

Although immigrant older adults want to adapt to the ways of Canada, it must be remembered that their own cultural background is longstanding and they are less adaptable than young immigrants. In the *Immigrant Seniors' Language Training Needs Research Project* (1993) the majority of those interviewed would prefer to learn English as part of a peer age group with the same interests and needs. In a broader sense, attending ESL programs is a "...means to get out of the house, to socialize and to learn a little English. For some this is the only form of independence they have" (Dean & Klymyshyn, 1993, p. 6).

Many immigrant seniors come to Canada as assisted relatives and live with their very protective children. Some have children who speak English well but do not encourage their parents to speak English themselves (Dean & Klymyshyn, 1993, p. 7). The children often feel their parents are too old to learn a new language. Many of these older people are concerned about being a burden on their children and spend many hours babysitting, doing housework or helping in the family business. Family relationships are integral to immigrant older adults. Therefore, strong family commitments on the part of the older adult, and lack of encouragement from family members, prevent many older immigrants from taking part in ESL programs.

Aboriginal older adults face many of the same barriers to improving their literacy ability as seniors in the general population; however, their barriers are frequently accentuated by racism, geographical isolation, and a history of culturally inappropriate education. Institutionalized racism in the schools, the church, and the community have led to negative experiences with the

education system, and to feelings of inferiority. Attitudes toward self, and the indifference of the education system, are learned and shared between parent and child over the generations. The result is illiteracy as a way of life for many aboriginal people, and very little support for the learning of older people. Furthermore, older aboriginal people often believe they are too old to learn and are extremely embarrassed about their lack of literacy ability.

These barriers to participation suggest that modified and culturally sensitive literacy programs for older adults need to be developed.

MOTIVATION FOR INCREASING LITERACY SKILLS

Older adults have motivational and interest needs that differ from younger literacy learners. The desire to secure or upgrade employment possibilities is often the key motivating factor for younger people. For older adults, the prime motivation lies in their ability to cope and enhance their quality of life.

The coping networks established around a life of illiteracy begin to falter as a person ages. Family and friends who were once part of the support system move away or die. "The need to read may reach a critical point in the lives of many illiterate elderly as the extensive coping network built up over half a century of working around the problems of illiteracy begins to crumble" (Rutherford, 1989, p. 11). Seniors with low levels of literacy then find themselves faced with a world of complex governmental, social, and medical bureaucracies, and without the resources to deal with the information.

Declining health, often associated with aging, makes it more difficult to cope with literacy demands. Poor health often leads to less social interaction, which results in fewer opportunities to gather information by talking with people. Vision and auditory deterioration can make it more difficult to gain information from television and radio. With the loss of support networks and the inability to read and/or write, wellness is difficult to maintain and an individual's health becomes threatened. It is this realization and the desire to maintain their independence that may prompt many older adults to seek literacy instruction.

Personal interests may also prompt older adults to join literacy programs. For example, they may want to do their income tax, read or write a will, understand the pamphlets doctors provide, read the newspaper, write to a friend, or read to their grandchildren. "Improved literacy skills generally assist older adults with limited reading abilities to adjust to the changes and problems that can arise as a result of aging" (Rutherford, 1989, p. 11). By joining a literacy program, many older adults become able to deal effectively and independently with a situation or problem.

In many aboriginal households the grandparents are the primary caregivers of the children. A traditional role of the elders is as the educators of the young. Many aboriginal older adults are motivated to improve their literacy skills in order to read to their grandchildren, or to improve communication with them.

The majority of newly-arrived immigrant older adults are motivated to improve their English speaking, listening, and reading skills so they may share in the Canadian way of life and understand the newspaper and other current reading material (Dean & Klymyshyn, 1993, p. 3). Others are motivated to improve their literacy skills in order to obtain employment or to volunteer their skills to Canadian society (Dean & Klymyshyn, 1993, p. 3). Participating in a literacy program reduces their sense of isolation and increases the feeling of independence and belonging.

The wish to improve their self-confidence or self-perception is another reason seniors seek literacy training (Mullan, 1992, p. 7). Memories of past failures and negative school experiences can cause them to feel very

insecure. Lack of self-esteem may have led them to feel stupid and incapable of learning. Since they feel they cannot learn, they continue to live a life of hiding their inability to read and write. Seeking literacy training breaks the cycle of low self-esteem and illiteracy.

Finally, many older adults with poor literacy skills desire to enhance their quality of life, and choose literacy training as the means. Enhancing their quality of life can mean many different things to different people but some components may include:

- to be able to read and write letters to family and friends
- to be able to relate to their grandchildren through reading
- to seek companionship in a literacy program
- to find meaning and purpose in life
- to be able to participate more fully in the community
- to read for enjoyment or to have something gainful to do
- to enhance their spiritual life by learning to read the Bible
- to be able to read the newspaper to find out more about the world
- to learn better conversational English. Speaking and listening skills are as important to immigrant seniors as reading and writing English. All are necessary to learn more about the Canadian way of life.

(Mullan, 1992, p. 7 & 8)

Older adults are motivated to improve their literacy skills by a variety of situations and reasons. Knowing these motivating factors will help develop strategies to reach older adults who could benefit from literacy training.

REACHING THE OLDER ADULT LITERACY LEARNER

Despite the fact that 65% of older adults have difficulty with everyday literacy skills, the low participation rate of older adults in Saskatchewan literacy programs indicates that older adults do not easily seek out literacy training opportunities. Strategies are needed to reach potential older learners and recruit them into literacy programs.

Rutherford (1989) states that the single most effective way to attract senior literacy learners to a program is through direct contact (p. 20). Older adults can be reached through their families, health workers, church groups, senior centres, and senior residences, and presented with the concept of literacy training. The social service network may be used to locate potential students since older persons who need language skills are also likely to need other forms of assistance (Rutherford, 1989, p. 20). Finally, current older students and tutors may be able to reach potential learners through their senior networks and through word of mouth.

We must recognize the individual and cultural differences in the diverse group called "seniors" and, by doing so, make literacy programs relevant to their needs and interests. If a literacy program is geared toward the motivational interests, cultural heritage, and literacy needs of older adults it will attract learners.

Promotion of current literacy programs needs to feature older adult learners and tutors of various cultural backgrounds in posters, newsletters, radio and

television commercials (Mullan, 1992, p. 12). This would promote awareness of older adult literacy among the general public as well as attract older learners.

Program promotion that focuses on motivating factors such as the desire for more self-confidence or the opportunity to socialize, may attract older adults to literacy programs. Also, if programs are geared to providing an opportunity for older adults to share their life experiences and skills they will see themselves as adding to our knowledge. These aspects of programs would meet some psychological and social needs as well as improving the literacy skills of participants.

Immigrant and aboriginal older adults may be more responsive to program promotion in their native languages. For older immigrants, more information and counselling when they arrive in Canada might encourage them to enter ESL programs. A major motivation for aboriginal older adults to improve their English skills is their desire to communicate with the young. Programming for this group could include the opportunity to work with youth in the revival of native languages and traditions.

A final strategy to reach potential older adult literacy learners is to promote literacy programs as lifelong learning instead of literacy training. By calling it something other than illiteracy we redefine the problem and leave people's dignity intact (Mullan, 1992, p. 13). Promotion that acknowledges and respects older adults' life experiences, fears, and strong coping mechanisms will help to reach and involve older adults in improving their literacy skills.

LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS OF OLDER ADULTS

Many older adults feel they are too old to learn and acquire new skills. But seniors can and do learn (Lothian & Jones, 1991, p. 40). While ability to learn does not diminish with age, the method of learning does change. Older adults and younger learners have different learning characteristics and styles (Rutherford, 1989, p. 12). This fact must be acknowledged and taken into consideration when designing and implementing an older adult literacy program. Adult educators need to normalize learning slowly for senior adults.

According to Lothian and Jones (1991) the two main kinds of knowledge, procedural and declarative, are both affected by the aging process. As some seniors age, their information retrieval and reaction times become slower (Lothian & Jones, 1991, p. 40), i.e. their procedural knowledge slows down and learning may take longer. Conversely, declarative knowledge that is based on experience and amassed over a lifetime actually improves with age.

Research in the area of mental functioning in older adults has found that aging does affect some mental processes as these relate to learning. Changes in sensory perception make it difficult to absorb sensory information coherently.

> Incoming images may linger. This can result in a decreased ability to disregard irrelevant information and may, in some instances, lead to confusion. As well, there are seniors who find organizing new information problematic (Lothian & Jones, 1991, p. 40).

Even though mental processing tends to slow down with increased age, it does not inhibit learning. Tutors should be aware of possible learner difficulties and make an effort to counteract processing problems. (Refer to Adaptations in Teaching Older Adults on pages 34 to 39 for practical suggestions to help learners overcome their difficulties.)

Other physiological effects of aging have an impact on the way older adults learn. Many seniors experience a decline in their ability to hear and/or see well. Instruction and learning resources may be difficult to hear or read if the volume is not loud or the print large enough. Illness and medication may cause social isolation, sleep disturbances, and difficulties with comprehension (Ostwald & Williams, 1986, p. 12).

A number of psychological factors also affect the way seniors learn. Older adults with poor literacy skills may feel fearful and anxious when returning to a learning situation. Memories of past learning failure, changing vocabulary and instructional practices, and the technology and bureaucracy associated with further learning often cause feelings of insecurity (Rutherford, 1989, p. 16). In addition, older adults tend to be more cautious and concerned about making mistakes. Their need for certainty may be related to an increasing fear of failure or to decreasing confidence in their ability (Ostwald & Williams, 1986, p. 11). Feelings of insecurity and cautiousness may interfere with learning if the tutor is not alert to the need to decrease anxiety, build self-esteem, and clarify expectations.

Newly-arrived immigrant older adults have feelings of insecurity which can affect their ability to learn. Of those participating in literacy programs, most

immigrant older adults opt for a part-time program because of this lack of confidence. Learning can be hampered further by the problems and stress of settling in a new country.

Older adults often prefer participatory learning, i.e. they prefer learning by demonstration, doing, and discussion. They also tend to be more selective, taking only what will be most useful to them. Because of their diverse styles and speeds of learning, new material should be presented in a variety of ways in order to foster greater retention (Lothian & Jones, 1991, p. 44). To make it their own, older adults need to see the material, hear the material, write it down, and talk about it. They need time to assimilate the information through a variety of modes in order for learning to take place.

Just as individual differences between people become greater with aging, the interests of the older population are diverse, ranging from developmental and life skills issues to politics and history. Reading materials in an older adult literacy program must reflect this variety.

Current literacy instruction must be modified to allow for the changes of aging. Only then can older adults enjoy the benefits of full participation in literacy programs.

ADAPTING PROGRAM DESIGN AND MATERIALS TO THE NEEDS OF OLDER ADULTS

The historical reasons for older adult illiteracy, the present barriers to improving literacy skill, and the motivations, interests, and learning characteristics of older adults have been examined. These factors shape the problem of senior illiteracy and provide a guide to adapting literacy programs for this age group.

Making the program fit the learner's needs in terms of interests, learning characteristics, and accessibility is the key to success. Practitioners and researchers in the field of older adult literacy have given widespread support to innovative programs developed specifically for seniors with low levels of literacy (Rutherford, 1989, p. 27). An alternative to additional programs is the appropriate adaptation of existing literacy programs.

ADAPTATIONS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

Older adults experience barriers related to self-perception. Many feel fear and anxiety when confronted with a learning situation. Literacy programs should be modified in order to establish a warm, accepting atmosphere. A psychological climate of acceptance, respect, support, and mutuality helps to reduce anxieties or feelings of low self-esteem in a new learning situation (Ostwald & Williams, 1986, p. 14). Peer tutoring in a relaxed, often social, environment, using a learner-directed approach, will help to establish such a psychological climate.

Programs can also be adapted to overcome barriers related to the physical limitations of older adults. The facility must be accessible, both in terms of mobility and location. It must be wheelchair accessible and easily reached by public transit.

> Many researchers have recommended the use of a site which seniors attend for other purposes as a suitable location for literacy programs. In so doing, many of the reasons for non-participation disappear. Suggested locations have been senior centres, community centres, special care homes, and in-home programs (Rutherford, 1989, p. 19).

In rural areas, where transportation is a problem, in-home tutoring may be preferable. Often the choice of location can be decided jointly by the tutor and learner.

Flexibility is the key. Time and duration of instruction should be adjusted to the needs of the senior. In general, tutoring sessions should be held during daylight hours and be no longer than one hour, several times per week. Time and duration of literacy tutoring may need to change because of personal circumstances, such as health problems and change of routine (Appleton & Dirk, 1992, p. 6).

To allow for visual and auditory limitations the environment must be well lighted and free from interruptions and background noises from television, radio, telephone, etc. (Ostwald & Williams, 1986, p. 14). Audio resources, including the tutor's own voice, should be clear and loud. All printed materials need to be in large print (larger than 12 font) and preferably on a matte surface. Many barriers can be overcome if older adult learners are

encouraged to engage in problem solving and helped to make decisions about their literacy instruction.

Several special needs groups within the senior population require even more flexible programming. These groups are: older seniors (75+), rural seniors, immigrant seniors, and aboriginal older adults.

Seniors age 75 years and over usually experience some degree of visual or auditory impairment and failing health which may limit their full participation in a literacy program. For these people, "read-to programs," in which volunteer tutors read to seniors, may be more useful (Lothian & Jones, 1991, p. 56). Read-to programs can help seniors with documents they must understand for legal, medical, and social reasons. Such programs take into consideration the special needs of older seniors.

Rural seniors can be considered a special needs group because they may be more isolated than their urban counterparts. In Saskatchewan, distances between towns and farms and cities, and the lack of public transportation, limit opportunities for many rural seniors to participate in literacy programs. Fewer educational activities are available to rural people, and programs operating in urban areas may not be known or accessible to them. A variety of distance education means combined with trained local tutors need to be explored.

Newly-arrived immigrant older adults require special methods and culturally sensitive programming. They need a program that emphasizes verbal and listening skills. A good deal of material is available to develop literacy skills

for new Canadians in this way, while increasing awareness of cultural similarities and differences. Seniors have the maturity and inclination to handle this material in depth, so careful selection is necessary to ensure it is appropriate for their needs. They respond well to small group instruction, in which they can share their successes and difficulties with others, preferably peers, while trying to adjust to life in a new country. Immigrant seniors generally have a desire for quality teaching and look for a structured program. Like many other older adults, health problems may prevent them from taking part in, or continuing in, language programs. Lack of transportation may also be a difficulty and, in such cases, home tutoring would be beneficial. Immigrant seniors in rural areas may not have access to specialized programming or support from other older newly-arrived immigrants.

Programming for older immigrants must respect the individual differences and needs of this group. Specifically, the level of native language literacy must be taken into account. Often, little distinction is made between "...a Cambodian Khmai peasant farmer who has never held a pencil and a Russian engineer with a Ph.D. who has not yet learned the Roman alphabet" (Weinstein-Shr, 1993, p. 1).

Aboriginal older adults need program adaptations that are sensitive to their experience with an inappropriate and non-supportive education system. These learners need to be tutored by an aboriginal person to establish understanding, caring, commitment, and friendship, as well as an abundance of peer and family support for their literacy efforts. Since illiteracy can often be intergenerational, literacy skill development for the

entire family may be an ideal program approach. Programming adapted to these needs will help to counteract the fear, embarrassment, and lack of support older adults feel about not being able to read and write.

Teaching literacy in the home of the older person may be an effective way to reduce the embarrassment of publicly attending a literacy program and eliminate transportation difficulties for the learner.

The timing of programs should also take into consideration the cycle of hunting and fishing, especially in the North. Fall and spring are peak times for these activities and therefore not always suitable for literacy instruction.

Adapting programs to overcome some of the barriers older adults face when seeking literacy training is a relatively easy endeavour. The first step is to become sensitive to the psychological, physical, program, and cultural barriers potential learners face. Then partnerships with older adults must be established in order to empower them to direct all aspects of their own learning.

ADAPTATIONS TO CAPITALIZE ON INTERESTS

The goals of literacy instruction should also be learner-directed. Each older learner will come into literacy training with specific interests and goals in mind; however, some common trends do exist. "Generally, older adults want meaningful instruction embedded in the fulfillment of emotional needs such as personal renewal, more social interactions and a general

enhancement of quality of life" (Lothian and Jones, 1991, p. 48). Literacy instruction needs to be sensitive to these general interests, and flexible enough to reflect the learners' specific interests and experiences.

Literacy training will be more relevant to older adult learners if resources match their interests and goals. Since older adults generally enter literacy training for situation-specific reasons, learning materials should match those reasons. For example, an older student wanting to improve his/her banking skills would benefit from using resources such as common bank forms (cheques, deposit slips, cheque records, etc.). Relevant materials for other students could include flyers, patterns, newspapers, recipes, family albums, calenders, phone bills, forms, etc. For aboriginal older adults, books and autobiographies with aboriginal content would be useful. Material should be of high interest and actively related to what the learner already knows (Rutherford, 1989, p. 22). A variety of tutoring methods and resources should be used but, at all times, the goals are those of the learner.

ADAPTATIONS IN TEACHING OLDER ADULTS

When teaching older adults, factors which affect learning such as psychological and physiological changes, must be taken into consideration. Seniors then must be supported to capitalize on abilities that remain the same or increase in strength. For example, older adults' declarative knowledge - knowledge based on life experiences - is significant. For optimal learning to take place, tutoring methods and resources should build on life experiences and take into consideration how older adults learn best.

As Ostwald and Williams (1986) state "...new learnings should be introduced so that elders can build on old experience and update their understanding of familiar concepts without feeling stupid" (p. 15).

Tutors can assist their learners to gain the optimal benefits from literacy instruction in the following ways:

- Reinforce the idea that older adults can and do learn.

- When working with older adults, be aware that non-verbal body language is important. For example, smiling, shaking hands, or a hand on the shoulder or back conveys warmth, understanding, and acceptance.

- Adopt culturally sensitive instruction methods to meet the diverse needs of aboriginal and immigrant older adults.

- Remember that aboriginal people see learning as an interpersonal process rather than an impersonal task. Therefore, the opportunity to develop friendships with other learners strengthens the learning process.

- Take into account that aboriginal oral history has been more important than the written word. It has served to transmit culture, values, and norms of behaviour from one generation to the next. The teachers have been the elders who were responsible for educating the young. Literacy programs should emphasize the importance of oral history and incorporate it.

- Use the Language Experience Approach. This method produces resource material which is usually of high interest and appropriate vocabulary for the learner. It allows learners to write their own experiences and opinions. This approach is used extensively in existing literacy programs and is most successful with beginning readers because the words, structure, and story are those of the learner (Appleton & Dirk, 1992, p. 9).

- Use the Language Experience Approach with aboriginal older adults because it is similar in structure to oral history so they can easily relate to it.

- Be aware that standard adult literacy tutoring methods and strategies are useful in instructing older adults. "Other strategies are development of sight word recognition (words that are quickly read and understood), use of phonic training (teaching the sounds the letters represent), and teaching understanding of word patterns (e.g. that get, wet, set and let sound similar)" (Rutherford, 1989, p. 22). These methods

simply need slight alterations, such as changes in pace and presentation, to better suit the needs of this group of learners.

- Use one-to-one peer tutoring in an informal social environment. "Fears and apprehensions about being in a learning situation can be greatly reduced if social interaction is freely mixed with educational experiences" (Rutherford, 1989, p. 22). Peer tutoring provides flexible, learner-directed literacy instruction, meaningful involvement, a social outlet, and friendship.

- Be aware that some older adults may find small peer group instruction more helpful because it offers mutual support and socializing.

- Present material slowly to allow for longer processing times. Tutors need to be flexible in this regard because learners may vary in the time they require to process information (Rutherford, 1989, p. 22).

- In order to facilitate successful learning experiences, attempt to reach the older learner through as many senses as possible, i.e. the tutor should "...allow the older learner to see the information, hear the explanation, to touch and feel the outcome whenever possible" (Snider & Ceridwyn, 1986, p. 7). Use all sensory modes, however, determine how the individual learns best and focus on that mode.

- Remember that focus and recall are improved if lessons are divided into distinct sections and the learner is encouraged to practice current information before moving on to new material (Rutherford, 1989, p. 22). Working with material in distinct units help to minimize lingering sensory images.

- Ensure all reading material reflects the learner's interests and ability, as well as possessing certain physical characteristics. Type should be large, bold, well-spaced, and printed on non-glossy paper to allow for easy readability.

With the proper program adaptations, older adults can benefit greatly from current literacy programs.

SUMMARY

Literacy is a basic human right as proclaimed by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. In today's information society, the ability to read and write has become a necessity. Literacy for older adults is needed to enable them to communicate with family and friends, manage their own affairs, and remain living independently in the community while contributing effectively to the larger society.

Based on estimates by Statistics Canada, 65% of older adults aged 55 to 69 are functionally illiterate (One Voice, 1991, p. 10). They have difficulty reading, writing, and doing basic mathematics. This means that a significant number of Saskatchewan seniors have difficulty reading health information, writing cheques, filling out forms, or finding important telephone numbers.

The reason such a high percentage of older adults have literacy difficulties is the lack of opportunity they had as children to obtain a sound education. Historically, early Saskatchewan socio-economic conditions did not support educational development, particularly in the rural areas. The Great Depression and the world wars interrupted and hampered schooling for both students and teachers. The result was fragmented, often poor education which translated into literacy problems later on.

In their later years many older adults find themselves confronted with barriers to improving their literacy skills. Social, political, intrapersonal,

physical, program, and cultural barriers prevent participation in traditional literacy programs.

Without basic literacy skills the world can be a confusing and lonely place in which medication labels, special diets, health instructions, street signs, bus schedules, and pamphlets advertising community services are meaningless. It is often the loss of their literacy support systems, combined with situation-specific reasons, that motivate many older adults to seek literacy instruction.

It takes special strategies in order to reach older adults and involve them in literacy programs. Targeting their interests, respecting their coping skills and life experiences, and implementing appropriate program adaptations will attract and benefit older adult literacy learners.

By focusing some of our efforts on adapting existing programs to meet the needs and interests of older literacy learners, or by creating new senior specific programs, we can increase the literacy level of a large segment of the population. As a result, more older adults will be more literate and therefore more self-sufficient. These seniors will be healthier and able to contribute their experience and wisdom to our communities. We will all benefit.

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APPENDIX I

THE SASKATCHEWAN OLDER ADULT LITERACY PROJECT

In February and March of 1992, Diane Mullan, in consultation with John Oussoren, of the Seniors' Education Centre, University Extension, U of R, designed and implemented a Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Survey. The purpose of the survey was to begin to understand and define the nature and state of literacy learning needs of older adults in the province. Recommendations arising from that survey included:

1) **Active consultation** with learners, tutors, literacy program coordinator, adult educators (including aboriginal, urban and rural groups and individuals).
2) **Resource development**. A review of existing North American older adult literacy resources and development of cultural and age appropriate resources for use in Saskatchewan and Canada.
3) **Program development**. Assistance in creating older adult literacy programs/components in as many of the existing Saskatchewan literacy programs as possible.
4) **Training workshops** with tutors and program coordinators dealing with resource development, training and on-going support.
5) **A public awareness program** via print and broadcast media. Possibly a video program.

PROJECT GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

Building on the results of the Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Survey, the Seniors' University Group and Seniors' Education Centre staff proposed an Older Adult Literacy Project which would begin to respond to older adult learning needs and gaps in current provincial literacy programs and related learning resources. The goals and objectives of the project follow.

GOALS

1) **Raise awareness of seniors' literacy needs and resources in the province**, which may vary generally according to region and specifically according to personal heritage of the literacy learners.

2) **Provide older adult literacy training and resources**, in consultation and cooperation with older adult tutors, learners, program coordinators and other community partners.

OBJECTIVES

1) Review literature and learning resources pertaining to older adult literacy and develop a topic specific **annotated bibliography**.

2) Produce an **older adult literacy resource manual** and disseminate to appropriate groups, agencies and individuals. The resource manual may include a simple **audio/visual component**.

3) Consult with a **focus group** of older adults, literacy tutors, learners, program coordinators and others involved in the field of literacy.

4) Organize and facilitate **two central Saskatchewan workshops** in order to share resources and provide training for interested literacy program coordinators and tutors; and to generally raise public awareness of older adult literacy.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

September 1993 to September 1994

A) Learning Resource Development

Following an extensive review of existing resources, teaching approaches and literature, project staff will develop an **annotated bibliography** and a draft of the **older adult literacy resource manual**. These materials will begin to respond to the need for information and approaches which are effective when working with the diverse population of older adult learners in Saskatchewan. The resource manual will give information to literacy workers about the particular needs of the older adult literacy learner, and will also attempt to be sensitive to the variety of cultural differences based on the province's geographical regions.

The learning resources, and possibly a simple **audio/visual component**, will be tested on older adults and others, revised, printed and distributed. The focus group will be instrumental in responding to the learning resources and suggesting ways in which to make the materials more useful to the target group.

B) The Training Workshops

Older adult literacy training workshops will be designed and facilitated by qualified and capable literacy trainers. The goals of the workshops will be the distribution of the newly developed learning resources, the sharing of relevant teaching and learning processes in sensitive cultural, age-appropriate ways, and continued consultation on regional needs and materials. The target group will be older adults, literacy program coordinators, tutors, learners and interested others.

C) Evaluation and Final Project Report

The success of the Older Adult Literacy Project will be determined through quantitative and qualitative measurements.

Formal feedback through evaluations forms and informal feedback through discussions with learners, tutors, literacy practitioners and other professionals will indicate the program's success in meetings its goals and objectives.

The number of participants in the workshops will demonstrate the level of interest and the on-going need for literacy programming for and with older adults in Saskatchewan.

Qualitative comments from learners, tutors and program coordinators about the learning resources and curricula will be another indicator of the ability of the project to meet its goals and objectives.

A 1/2 day consultation with the focus group will be organized to receive feedback for the final report and recommendations for the future.

CONCLUSION

To date, little has been done to explore and meet the learning needs and resources of older adults who have poor or no reading and writing ability. With the completion of the Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project, existing literacy programs will be more equipped to meet the needs of older adult learners and tutors. With the concrete resources of the annotated bibliography, the resource manual, and the workshop training, the Seniors' Education Centre will have made a significant contribution to improving the availability of literacy learning for and with older adults.

OLDER ADULT LITERACY RESOURCE MANUAL

PART TWO: WORKSHOP GUIDE

A workshop resource guide for trainers of literacy tutors and others interested in older adult literacy

Seniors' Education Centre
University Extension
University of Regina
Room 106.4 Gallery Building
College Avenue and Cornwall Street
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4S 0A2

Phone: (306) 779-4816
Fax: (306) 779-4825

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February 14, 1995

OLDER ADULT LITERACY PROJECT
SENIORS' EDUCATION CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

OLDER ADULT LITERACY RESOURCE MANUAL

EVALUATION SHEET FOR USERS OF THE MANUAL (PARTS ONE AND TWO)

The Seniors' Education Centre would like your feedback about this manual to determine how useful it has been in increasing awareness of older adult literacy issues.

Please complete this form and return it to:

Older Adult Literacy Project
Seniors' Education Centre
University Extension, University of Regina
Room 106 Gallery Building
College Avenue and Cornwall Street
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4S 0A2
Phone: (306) 779-4816 Fax: (306) 779-4825
E-Mail Userid: GOETTLER@MAX.CC.UREGINA.CA

1. Please list 2 or 3 items you liked about the manual.

2. Please list 2 or 3 items you would change in this manual.

3. Other comments

4. Please rate the components of the manual according to the scale. (Keep in mind: clarity, user-friendliness, amount and quality of information)

	Excellent	Good	Okay	Poor
PART ONE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES				
a. How To Use This Resource Manual				
b. Introduction				
c. An Overview Of Literacy Among Saskatchewan Older Adults				
d. Selected Historical Perspectives on Seniors' Literacy Problems				
e. Barriers To Improving Literacy Skills				
f. Motivation For Increasing Literacy Skills				
g. Reaching The Older Adult Literacy Learner				
h. Learning Characteristics Of Older Adults				
i. Adapting Program Design And Materials To The Needs Of Older Adults				
j. Summary				
k. Reference List				
l. Appendices				
PART TWO: WORKSHOP GUIDE				
a. How To Use This Resource Manual				
b. Facilitator Notes				
c. Appendices				

THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSE

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Darla Goettler, Project Coordinator
Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project

RESOURCE MANUAL DEVELOPERS

Older adults are a diverse group of individuals with a wide range of life experiences. Their cultural heritage and geographical location adds to the variety. In Saskatchewan, the contrasting experiences of rural and urban seniors, aboriginals and recent immigrants, and northern and southern older adults have a direct impact on their literacy ability. To respect this diversity and show its effect on literacy and the ability to improve skills, information pertaining specifically to aboriginal and newly-arrived immigrant older adults has been included in the manual by people working in the field.

GERALDINE REDIRON, Literacy Facilitator for Northlands College, used her experience working with aboriginal communities in Northern Saskatchewan to write about the literacy needs of older aboriginal people. **JEANETTE DEAN**, ESL instructor for the Saskatoon Open Door Society, used her knowledge of the literacy needs of newly-arrived immigrant seniors to explain the impact of poor English literacy on the lives of this group. **DARLA GOETTLER**, Coordinator of the Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project, researched and wrote the remaining material, and arranged for overall production, printing, and distribution on behalf of the Seniors' Education Centre.

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HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE MANUAL

This document is **PART TWO** of a two-part workshop resource manual intended to help trainers of literacy tutors, and others, to raise awareness of the particular needs of older adult literacy learners. Part One contains basic information on the topic of older adult literacy. Part Two is a workshop guide. Both parts of the manual will help workshop facilitators plan and implement workshops for a diverse group of learners, such as literacy tutors, older adults, adult educators, and others who work with seniors. The manual may also be a useful tool for those interested in incorporating an older adult literacy component into their adult literacy programs.

Part One material is a review of the most current literature available and has a Canadian and, especially, a Saskatchewan emphasis. To capture some of the diversity of Saskatchewan older adults and their needs, information on aboriginal and newly-arrived immigrant seniors has been included. The material could be used in a workshop or simply read for information. Part One is a stand-alone document.

Part Two, the workshop guide, includes facilitator notes which cover the same topics as Part One, but are abbreviated for facilitators to use as notes when conducting a workshop. The workshop guide can not be used as a stand-alone document. Please read Part One of the manual first, then Part Two if you want to organize a workshop on the issues discussed in these materials.

An appendix to Part One material provides detailed information on the Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Project. The workshop guide appendices in Part Two provide supporting materials: a workshop outline, additional workshop options, getting acquainted exercises, group activity suggestions, a sample participant evaluation form, and a list of other resources.

This manual is not intended to teach literacy volunteers how to tutor older adults. It is an awareness-raising and information resource designed to sensitize tutors to the special needs and difficulties seniors face when seeking instruction. The information will help tutors to be more effective and supportive of their learner's unique circumstances. It is hoped that this resource manual will increase public awareness, training, and program and resource development in the area of older adult literacy.

Definitions:

The terms **older adults** and **seniors** are used interchangeably throughout the text and refer to persons 55 years of age and older.

The term **aboriginal** is used in this text in the same way as it is in the Canadian Constitution to include Treaty Indian, Metis, and Inuit people. Please note, however, that this definition is not a self-definition of the people named and is not necessarily acceptable to the people who are included in the definition.

FACILITATOR NOTES

GETTING ACQUAINTED EXERCISE

(See Appendix III, p. 32)

INTRODUCTION

- The ability to read and write is a fundamental human right, essential for full participation in society.

- Literacy skills help older adults maintain their independence, personal safety, self-esteem, and a state of wellness.

- Saskatchewan literacy programs have been successful in meeting many of the literacy needs of a diverse population. However, little has been done to explore and meet the literacy needs of older adults.

- **Workshop Goal:** To bridge the gap and begin to address the needs of senior literacy learners.

- **Workshop Target Group:** Older adult learners, literacy tutors, seniors' organization representatives, literacy program coordinators, and others who are interested.

- **Workshop Objective:** To prepare participants to understand the needs of seniors with poor literacy skills and to work with older adult literacy learners.

- **Workshop Tasks:** To review the current knowledge of and resources on older adult literacy. Topics range from historical perspectives and barriers to motivating factors and program adaptation.

- **Workshop Outcome:** At the completion of the workshop participants will be more sensitive to the unique life experiences of older adults and better able to design approaches which meet their literacy needs.

GROUP ACTIVITY - PRE-SESSION QUIZ

(See Appendix IV - A, p. 33)

Objective of exercise

* *Pre-session quiz should be discussed and completed in small groups of 3 or 4 workshop participants. This will facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experience, and perceptions among participants.*
* *This quiz is meant to give participants an idea of the accuracy of their views about seniors in general and about older adult literacy specifically. The quiz is strictly to help participants explore their own perceptions; they will not be asked to hand the quiz in.*

* *The quiz will also act as a preview to the workshop content and will be a basis for the day's learning*

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERACY AMONG SASKATCHEWAN OLDER ADULTS

DEFINITIONS

Literacy - The information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community (Statistics Canada, Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities).

Functional Literacy - Often equated with Grades 5 to 8 reading and writing skill levels which are not adequate for effective everyday functioning (Hindle, 1989).

STATISTICS

- According to Statistics Canada's *Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities*, 65% of Canadians ages 55 to 69 experience some degree of difficulty meeting everyday reading demands:

    - 29% who can handle simple reading tasks but tend to avoid situations requiring reading.
    - 21% who can use printed materials for only limited purposes.
    - 15% who identify themselves as people who cannot read.

- In 1981, 72% of native elderly in the south had less than Grade 9 education compared to 61% of non-native seniors 65 years of age and over (Sask. Senior Citizens' Provincial Council, 1988, p. 37).

- In the north, 93% of the total sample of native elderly have no formal education beyond the elementary level (Sask. Senior Citizens' Provincial Council, 1988, p. 37).

- A large percentage of older adults could benefit from entering a literacy program, but Saskatchewan program participation rates do not reflect the need.

- Less than 10% of approximately 2100 learners enrolled in Saskatchewan literacy programs in the 1991-92 academic year were 55 years of age or older (Mullan, 1992, p. 4).

IMPLICATIONS

- Older adults with poor literacy skills find it increasingly difficult to cope with the changing world as they age and as their support system crumbles. In the long run they experience a decrease in their quality of life.

- Literacy is a basic need for older adults so they may have access to basic information such as bus schedules, health pamphlets, and community services.

- Seniors with low literacy often experience more health problems. They often misunderstand medical and dietary instructions.

- Seniors with low literacy are often at the bottom of the economic scale.

- The difficulties associated with low literacy are complicated by diminished hearing and eyesight, part of the normal aging process.

- Seniors with low levels of literacy are at higher risk of exploitation and isolation.

- Aboriginal and immigrant older adults with low levels of literacy, because of language and cultural barriers, racism, and often geographical isolation, are especially vulnerable to misinformation, isolation, and loss of independence.

GROUP ACTIVITY - "HOW OLD ARE YOU?"

(See Appendix IV - B, p. 37)

Objectives of exercise

* *The main purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate the variety of perceptions people have of themselves, and the inaccuracy of assumptions we make about people, or groups of people, based on age. Such false assumptions are particularly strong when we examine older adult illiteracy. This exercise will help participants become more open about such issues as the reasons some older adults have poor literacy skills, why many seniors do not seek literacy training, and the ability of seniors to learn.*

* *A secondary purpose is to foster positive feelings within the group that can grow out of sharing personal views.*

SELECTED HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SENIORS' LITERACY PROBLEMS

- Historically, Saskatchewan older adults have experienced a lack of opportunity for education due to the world wars and the Great Depression.

- Due to the rural agricultural base of the early Saskatchewan economy, many children were expected to leave school and help out on the family farm. This led to interrupted and fragmented school years.

- The war years also took children out of school to work at home.

- The Depression brought drought, poverty, and school closures.

- During the world wars, teachers were taken away from the classroom to serve in the armed forces, and untrained individuals were recruited to take their place.

- Rural Saskatchewan schools did not attract or keep good teachers, which directly affected the quality of education.

- Government and church policies were obstacles to the acquisition of education by aboriginal children.

- Church-run residential schools and policies, such as "English only," isolated many young aboriginal people from their family, community, and culture, hampering their learning environment.

- For aboriginal children, schools and learning became associated with loneliness, separation, and fear, and were thus avoided.

- Family and economic circumstances of aboriginal people also had an impact on educational attainment.

- The hunting and trapping lifestyle of northern aboriginal people kept families away from town and schools for lengthy periods of time.

- The early 1900's were a time of high immigration rates. The isolation and uncertainty of a new country, and language barriers, created difficulties in learning.

- Literacy skills, if not used consistently, will decline over time. Many older adults with low literacy have experienced this decline.

- The economic, political, and social factors of the era shaped the availability and accessibility of education and limited opportunities for many students.

BARRIERS TO IMPROVING LITERACY SKILLS

- The rate of participation of older adults in literacy programs does not reflect the large number of seniors with low levels of literacy.

- Social-political, self-perception, physical, program, and cultural barriers prevent older adults from participating in existing adult literacy programs.

SOCIAL-POLITICAL BARRIERS

- Literacy training for older adults is given low priority by government and society because:

    - seniors are no longer productive members of the workforce
    - an ageist myth perpetuates the idea that "seniors are too old to learn new things."

- A great deal of social stigma is attached to being unable to read and write.

- We tend to blame individuals for literacy difficulties rather than allowing for lack of educational opportunity and acknowledging the complex survival skills these older adults have developed.

SELF-PERCEPTION BARRIERS

- Low self-esteem, fear of failure, past negative school experiences and the belief that "I'm too old to learn," pose a significant barrier to older adults improving their literacy skills.

PHYSICAL BARRIERS

- Physical changes such as declining vision, hearing loss, and mobility problems can be reasons for non-participation in programs if accessibility and the environment are not addressed.

- Lack of transportation, especially in rural and northern areas, poses a significant barrier to participation.

PROGRAM BARRIERS

- Program conditions such as duration, frequency, and scheduling of literacy instruction may act as deterrents if not appropriate for older adult.

- Responsibility for grandchildren may prevent some immigrant and aboriginal older adults from participating in a literacy program if on-site childcare is not available.

- Print, audio, and video materials used with older adults may be barriers if they are not presented in a large and clear format.

- Advertising of literacy programs usually depicts young people and focuses on developing skills for employment, which reinforces the belief that literacy programs are not for older people.

CULTURAL BARRIERS

- Lack of culturally sensitive literacy programming, which takes into consideration the unique life experiences and cultural backgrounds of older adults, is a deterrent for many aboriginals and immigrants.

- Older immigrants have traditional cultural backgrounds and can find it difficult to adapt to new cultural norms.

- Family commitments such as housework and childcare, and lack of support from children, prevents some older immigrants from taking part in ESL programs.

- Racism, geographical isolation and a history of culturally inappropriate education has led to illiteracy as a way of life for many aboriginal people.

GROUP ACTIVITY - SENSITIVITY EXERCISE

(See Appendix IV - C, p. 38)

Objective of exercise

* *The goal of the exercise is to make the point that literacy programs must be adapted to better suit the needs of older adults.*

* *This exercise is also intended to sensitize workshop participants to the significant barriers some older adults encounter daily -- barriers which hinder their attempts to improve their literacy skills.*

* *A word to the workshop leader(s). Until the workshop group becomes trusting and cohesive, all participants may not wish to participate in this group activity. Some participants may wish to remain in an observer role. Also, a copy of the exercise should be given to each participant.*

MOTIVATION FOR INCREASING LITERACY SKILLS

Motivational factors that prompt older adults to seek literacy instruction centre around the ability to cope and enhance their quality of life.

- Support systems for older adults begin to falter as they age, leaving seniors who have low levels of literacy with fewer resources to deal with information.

- Declining health often makes it more difficult to cope with literacy demands.

- Poor health often leads to isolation which makes it more difficult to gain information from friends.

- Declining vision and hearing makes it more difficult to gain information from radio and television.

- Personal interests such as the desire to do income tax, read or write a will, understand health pamphlets, or read to their grandchildren prompt many older adults to join literacy programs.

- As primary caregivers of the children, many aboriginal older adults are motivated to improve their literacy skills in order to read to and communicate better with their grandchildren.

- Newly-arrived immigrant older adults are motivated to improve their English skills so that they may share in a Canadian way of life.

- Seniors seek literacy training to improve their self-confidence or self-perception.

- Many older adults desire to enhance their quality of life and choose literacy training as the means.

Motivating factors are varied and can help in developing strategies to reach older adults.

REACHING THE OLDER ADULT LITERACY LEARNER

- As older adults do not readily seek out literacy training, strategies to reach them should be designed and implemented.

- The most effective way to attract senior literacy learners to a program is through direct contact or via family, friends, the social service network, and senior networks.

- Literacy programs should be geared toward the motivational interests, cultural heritage, and literacy needs of older adults.

- Older adults should be featured in advertising of current literacy programs.

- The opportunity for seniors to meet some of their psychological and social needs by participating in a literacy program should be highlighted.

- Advertising in aboriginal and immigrant languages may attract these older adults to literacy programs.

- More information and counselling on arrival might help many older immigrants to enter ESL programs.

- Promotion which emphasizes the opportunity to work with youth in the revival of native languages and tradition may reach many aboriginal older adults.

- Literacy training should be promoted as lifelong learning in order to respect older adults' life experiences, fears, and coping mechanisms.

LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS OF OLDER ADULTS

- While the ability to learn does not diminish with age, older adults do learn differently:

    - Procedural knowledge -- knowledge related to mental processing and learning time -- slows down and learning takes longer.

    - Declarative knowledge -- knowledge based on ones life experiences -- actually increases with age.

    - Aging does affect some mental processes as these relate to learning, such as the pace of mental processing and the ability to absorb sensory information.

    - Incoming sensory images linger longer which may lead to confusion and difficulty in organizing new information.

- A decline in eyesight and hearing often makes it difficult to hear instruction or read resource materials.

- Illness and medication may cause social isolation, sleep disturbances, and difficulties with comprehension. These may affect the way seniors learn.

- Fear, feelings of insecurity, and cautiousness may hamper the learning process.

- Older adults prefer learning by demonstration, doing, and discussion - participatory learning.

- The interests of the older population are very diverse.

Given the unique learning characteristics of older adults, adaptations to current literacy programs are necessary if they are to meet the needs of senior literacy learners.

ADAPTING PROGRAM DESIGN AND MATERIALS TO THE NEEDS OF OLDER ADULTS

- There is a need for literacy programs developed specifically for seniors.

- Existing literacy programs could be appropriately adapted to meet the needs of seniors.

ADAPTATIONS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

The following adaptations will assist older adults to overcome barriers to improve their literacy skills:

- To overcome barriers related to fear and anxiety, literacy programs should be modified in such a way as to create a climate of warmth, acceptance, and support. Peer tutoring in a social environment helps to establish this climate.

- To overcome barriers related to physical limitations, the facility should be wheelchair accessible, easily reached by public transit, and familiar to the learner.

- Flexible times and duration of instruction are necessary when working with older adults. Tutoring sessions should be held during daylight hours and be no longer than one hour, several times per week. Time and duration of instruction need to be learner directed.

- To overcome visual and auditory limitations, alterations should be made to program materials and the environment. Audio resources, including the tutor's voice, should be clear and audible. Printed materials must be in large bold print. The environment should be well lighted, warm, and free from interruptions and background noise.

Special needs groups within the older adult population require even more flexible programming. These groups are older seniors (75+), rural older adults, immigrant seniors, and aboriginal older adults.

- Older seniors (75+), who may be experiencing failing health, may benefit more from a "read-to program."

- Rural elderly can be considered a special needs group because they often experience more isolation due to the distance between Saskatchewan towns, and because they have fewer opportunities to take part in literacy programs. Transportation and flexible tutoring locations may benefit this group.

- Newly arrived immigrant older adults need a program that emphasizes verbal and listening skills while increasing awareness of cultural similarities and difference. Small peer group instruction often is preferred where learners can share their successes and difficulties with others while trying to adjust to life in a new country.

- Aboriginal older adults require program adaptations that emphasize friendship, caring, appreciation of their culture, and commitment to counteract the fear and embarrassment instilled by a harsh residential school system.

ADAPTATIONS TO CAPITALIZE ON INTERESTS

- Generally, older adults want meaningful literacy instruction that will fulfill their social and emotional needs, and enhance their quality of life. Literacy programs will need to be sensitive to these general interests and flexible enough to take into account individual interests and experiences.

- Literacy resources should suit the interests and goals of older adult learners, and be related to the reasons they sought literacy training.

ADAPTATIONS IN TEACHING OLDER ADULTS

Practical suggestions for tutors to help their learners overcome difficulties include the following:

- Reinforce the idea that older adults can and do learn.

- Develop culturally-sensitive literacy instruction based on their life experiences and present everyday needs.

- Use non-verbal body language that conveys warmth, understanding, and acceptance.

- Emphasize the interpersonal aspect of learning by encouraging the development of friendships.

- Emphasize the importance of oral history and incorporate it into approaches to literacy skill development.

- Use the Language Experience Approach. Refer to Appendix VI (Other Resources) for a list of literacy programs in which information about this approach can be obtained.

- Use the Language Experience Approach when working with aboriginal people as it is similar in structure to oral history.

- Use other standard adult literacy tutoring methods, such as sight word recognition, phonic training, and word patterns.

- Tutor on a one-to-one peer basis in an informal, social environment. Instruction in small informal groups can be useful for some learners.

- Present material slowly to allow for longer processing time.

- Reach the older learner through as many senses as possible.

- Work with material in distinct units.

- Use reading material which reflects the learner's interests and is in large, bold print on matte paper.

With appropriate program adaptations, older adults can benefit greatly from current literacy programs.

GROUP ACTIVITY - REVIEW QUIZ

(See Appendix IV - A, p. 33)

SUMMARY

- Literacy is a basic human right and necessary for survival in today's information society.

- 65% of older Canadian adults 55 to 69 have difficulty reading, writing, and doing mathematics.

- Historical reasons, particularly the Depression and the world wars contributed to the lack of opportunity for older adults to obtain an education.

- Social, political, intrapersonal, physical, program, and cultural barriers prevent older adults from improving their literacy skills.

- The loss of their literacy support system, combined with situation-specific reasons, motivates many older adults to seek out literacy instruction.

- Respecting seniors' interests, coping skills, and life experiences, and implementing proper program adaptations, will help to reach and involve some older adults in literacy programs.

- Program adaptations and/or creating new senior-specific literacy programs will significantly increase the literacy skills of the older adult population.

- Increasing the literacy skills of older adults will result in healthier and more self-sufficient seniors who are better able to contribute to the community.

PARTICIPANT WORKSHOP EVALUATION

(See Appendix V, p. 39)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

I. Getting Acquainted Exercise

II. Workshop Introduction
    Purpose of the workshop
    Review of workshop outline

III. Group Activity - Pre-session Quiz

IV. Older Adult Literacy

1. An overview of literacy among Saskatchewan older adults

    Group Activity - "How Old Are You?"

2. Historical perspectives for seniors' literacy problems

3. Barriers to improving literacy skills

    Group Activity - Sensitivity Exercise

4. Motivation for increasing literacy skills

5. Reaching the older adult literacy learner

6. Learning characteristic of older adults

7. Adapting program design and materials to the needs of older adults

VI. Group Activity - Review quiz

VII. Summary and Evaluation

Additional options for extending or altering the basic workshop format can be found in Appendix II - Additional Workshop Options.

APPENDIX II

ADDITIONAL WORKSHOP OPTIONS

The following are additional options for extending or altering the basic workshop format. Please be creative with a variety of options that will better suit your participants' interests and needs.

Option #1 **Guest Speaker**

- on literacy and older adults
- on older adult education in general
- on tutoring older adult literacy learners

Option #2 **Saskatchewan adult literacy programs and future initiatives**

- locally available literacy services and programs
- program adaptation to meet the needs of older adults
- developing a literacy program for and with older adults

Option #3 **Tutor training and techniques**

- discussion of tutoring strategies including the language experience approach, lesson planning, and evaluation
- refer to Appendix VI - Other Resources - for a list of literacy programs and contacts which may be helpful

Option #4 **Review of older adult literacy materials**

- review of available basic literacy skill materials and discussion of their appropriateness for older adults
- exploration of other potential learning resources for older adults
- review of other program resources including audio/video resources, written resources, and services. The Older Adult Literacy Annotated Bibliography may be used as a resource

APPENDIX III

GETTING ACQUAINTED EXERCISES

To show participants they are welcome and their attendance has been planned for, provide name tags and/or table tents with their names on them. Having refreshments available for participants when they arrive is a way to help people mingle.

Option #1 **The Round**

Introduce yourself and other workshop facilitators and/or organizers. Do a "round" with your workshop group. Have each person introduce himself/herself by name, location and literacy experience or interest. An option would be to invite participants to pair up with someone else they do not know and interview each other. Prepare several questions ahead of time in order to guide the interview, but make the questions fun. After a few minutes, convene the group and ask the participants to introduce each other to the group.

Option #2 **The Scavenger Hunt**

Introduce yourself and other workshop facilitators and/or organizers. Prepare a "Person to Person Scavenger Hunt" list. Participants circulate within the room and match questions on the list with signatures from the group. Someone with the same color eyes, born in the same province, with great grandchildren, who likes to cook, who is a great speller, likes to read Shakespeare, who speaks a language other than English, who has the same number of letters in their name as you, etc. Give participants 15 minutes to collect signatures. See if anyone has collected names for every question.

Option #3 **Group Formation**

Introduce yourself and other workshop facilitators and/or organizers. If you want small groups, have everyone jot down on an 8" x 10" card one adjective which describes themselves. The participants then circulate and grab onto others whose word card appeals to them. The resulting groups may then introduce themselves and describe their rationale in forming their group.

The above "Getting Acquainted" ideas have been adapted from:

Gourlay, G. (1993). Leading the way to literacy: A how-to handbook for seniors' literacy groups. Grande Prairie, Alberta: Seniors Helping Seniors, the Reading Network, Grande Prairie Regional College.

APPENDIX IV

GROUP ACTIVITIES

A. PRE-SESSION QUIZ - "OLDER ADULTS AS LITERACY LEARNERS"

1. Older adults who cannot read above a fifth grade level are:

   a. more likely than other demographic groups to seek assistance
   b. less likely than other demographic groups to seek assistance
   c. act no differently than other groups
   d. studies are inconclusive

2. Many older adults finally seek reading help in order to:

   a. read to their grandchildren
   b. handle financial matters once done by a now deceased spouse
   c. read Shakespeare and Frost
   d. all of the above

3. A primary reason why many older persons do not seek reading help is:

   a. people over 65 cannot learn new things
   b. they've coped successfully so far
   c. no one wants to teach them
   d. it's too much trouble

4. The reason why many older persons did not learn to read is:

   a. they lived too far from school
   b. fewer trained teachers were available
   c. family and economic responsibilities took precedence
   d. all of the above

5. A comment which might temporarily mask a reading problem is:

   a. "What does this say, I can't make out the handwriting?"
   b. "Please read this for me, I forgot my glasses"
   c. "I don't get around well, would you mind doing my (banking, grocery shopping, card shopping) when you do your own?"
   d. all of the above
   e. one of the above

6. Literacy tutors for older adults need to be:

   a. university graduates
   b. certified teachers
   c. retired people
   d. interested volunteers (which may include all of the above)

7. Best outreach method to use in contacting non-reading seniors is:

   a. mass mailing of an informative letter
   b. one on one approach by a known individual
   c. random phone solicitation
   d. sponsoring a social event or luncheon

8. Barriers which must be overcome in order to bring more older adults to literacy services include:

   a. transportation
   b. negative attitudes on the part of service providers
   c. fear of failure by the potential learner
   d. physical limitations of some older adults
   e. all of the above

9. The I.Q. of the average human:

   a. remains constant over time until age 58-60, then begins to decrease by as much as .96% each year
   b. increases steadily until age 20, remains constant, then begins to decline after 72
   c. remains relatively constant over time in both women and men, but declines rapidly in men after age 68
   d. does not diminish with age

10. Attitudinal problems on the part of literacy service providers might include:

   a. subscription to the "Can't teach an old dog new tricks" theory
   b. greater concern for the job placement element of learning to read
   c. belief that lack of demand by seniors for the service reflects a lack of need for the service
   d. all of the above

11. Research shows:

    a. most adults over 72 have basically no long-term memory skills
    b. most adults over 78 experience a sequencing problem with their memory skills
    c. no change in short-term memory capacity associated with age
    d. all of the above

12. Good advice about selecting materials:

    a. darker colored paper is best to use with older students
    b. white or yellow paper should never be used with an older student
    c. only use professionally developed books
    d. choose materials where the print is large and bold and contrasts highly against the paper

13. It is a good idea to develop a:

    a. strict tutor/learner relationship with your older student
    b. very relaxed relationship with your older student - let him or her call all the shots
    c. democratic relationship with your student - this will allow your student to set goals and you to plot reasonable ways to attain them
    d. the nature of the relationship is almost irrelevant - that you are there for the person at all is all that counts

Objective of exercise

* This quiz is meant to give participants an idea about the accuracy of their own views about seniors in general and about older adult literacy. The quiz is strictly to help participants explore their own perceptions; they won't be turning the quiz in.

* The quiz will also act as a preview to the workshop content and will be a basis for learning for the day.

Material taken from:

Price, M. (1988). I can read...at last! Trainer's guide: A training workshop for literacy tutors of the elderly. Syracuse, New York: Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (pp. 13 - 16)

Note: This quiz may be reproduced, without permission, for educational or instructional purposes providing that full credit is given to the Literacy Volunteers of America.

ANSWERS TO THE PRE-SESSION QUIZ

1.	b	8.	e
2.	d	9.	d
3.	b	10.	d
4.	d	11.	c
5.	d	12.	d
6.	d	13.	c
7.	b		

B. "HOW OLD ARE YOU?"

Ask each participant to write the answer to this question on his or her name tent or piece of paper:

"HOW OLD WOULD YOU BE IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW HOW OLD YOU ARE?"

Explain: "Think about yourself for a minute as if you were an unbiased observer. What age fits your description? Is it the same as your actual age? Why, or why not?"

Ask participants to discuss their answer with others in their group.

People will probably respond with ages younger than their actual ages. A few will respond with the same, or older.

Objectives of exercise

* The main purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate the variety of perceptions people have of themselves, and the inaccuracy of assumptions we make about people, or groups of people based on numerical age. Such false assumptions are particularly strong when we examine older adult illiteracy. This exercise will help participants become more open about issues such as the reasons why some older adults have poor literacy skills, why many seniors do not seek out literacy training, and seniors' ability to learn.

* A secondary purpose is to foster positive feelings within the group that can grow out of sharing personal views.

Price, M. (1988). I can read...at last! Trainer's guide: A training workshop for literacy tutors of the elderly. Syracuse, New York: Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (pp. 7 & 8)

C. SENSITIVITY EXERCISE

Some older adults have physical and perceptual impairments which serve as barriers to improving their literacy skills. The following exercises will help participants to better understand why some older adults cannot participate in our current literacy programs.

1. Distribute props to 1/2 of the workshop group. Props may include:

   - blindfolds or sunglasses blurred with Vaseline or spotted with marking pen
   - earplugs (cotton or earmuffs)
   - temporary leg splint, elastic knee support or arm sling
   - canes, walkers, wheelchairs
   - forms and documents written in another language
   - others

2. Assign a partner without props.

3. Distribute a task to each pair. Tasks may include:

   - read a fine print document
   - converse with your partner
   - use the restroom
   - make a telephone call
   - buy a coke
   - fill out a necessary form
   - others

4. Ask everyone to return to the large group in 20 minutes and talk about their experiences.

Objective of exercise

* The goal of this exercise is to demonstrate the reasons why literacy programs must be adapted to suit the needs of older adults.

* This exercise is also meant to sensitize workshop participants to the very real barriers some older adults encounter daily -- barriers that hinder their attempts to improve their literacy skills

Price, M. (1988). I can read...at last! Trainer's guide: A training workshop for literacy tutors of the elderly. Syracuse, New York: Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (p. 12)

APPENDIX V

OLDER ADULT LITERACY WORKSHOP

EVALUATION

Your comments and feedback are critical to evaluating this workshop and planning future work, so please take some time to give us those comments.

1. What is your overall rating of the workshop?

   Excellent [ ] Good [ ] Fair [ ] Poor [ ]

2. Things about the workshop that I found most helpful:

3. Things about the workshop that I found least helpful:

4. Things that I learned:

5. I wish we had spent more time discussing:

6. Suggestions and/or comments to the workshop facilitator(s):

7. Other comments:

APPENDIX VI

OTHER RESOURCES

PRINTED RESOURCE

Saskatchewan Older Adult Literacy Survey - Final Report
July 1992

Produced by: The Seniors' Education Centre, University Extension, University of Regina

Older Adult Literacy Resource Materials - An Annotated Bibliography
January 1994

Produced by: The Seniors' Education Centre, University Extension, University of Regina

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCE

Medicine Hat College Seniors' Literacy - "Literacy Alive"
Produced in 1991

A program segment highlighting seniors' literacy as part of a larger program special on literacy, produced in celebration of the International Year of Literacy.

A copy of the program segment may be obtained from:

Medicine Hat College
Seniors' Literacy Programs
Division of Community Education and Program Development
299 College Dr. S.E.
Medicine Hat, Alberta
T1A 3Y6
Phone: (403) 529-3844
Fax: (403) 527-0459

PROGRAM RESOURCES

Saskatchewan Literacy Programs

Carlton Trail Regional College
Mr. Richard Peasley
Literacy Coordinator
P.O. Box 720
Humbolt, Saskatchewan S0K 2A0

Telephone #: 682-2623
Fax #: 682-3101

Circle Project
Literacy Coordinator
625 Elphinstone Street
Regina, Saskatchewan S4T 3L1

Telephone#: 347-7515
Fax #: 347-7519

Cumberland Regional College
Mr. Grant Wilson
Literacy Coordinator
P. O. Box 967
Tisdale, Saskatchewan S0E 1T0

Telephone #: 873-2525
Fax #: 873-4450

Cypress Hills Regional College
Ms. Adelaide Steinley
Literacy Coordinator
129-2nd Avenue North East
Swift Current, Saskatchewan
S9H 2C6

Telephone #: 773-1531
Fax #: 773-2384

Kelsey Institute - SIAST
Ms. Eleanor Charman
Literacy Coordinator
P. O. Box 1520
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3R5

Telephone #: 933-8374
Fax #: 933-8032

Lakeland College
Ms. Tamara Topolniski
Literacy Programmer
Bag 6600,2602-59th Avenue
Lloydminister, Saskatchewan
S9V 1Z3

Telephone #: (403) 871-5718
Fax #: (403) 875-1813

Northlands College - Central Region
Ms. Lynne Dunning
Literacy Facilitator
Box 509
La Ronge, Saskatchewan S0J 1L0

Telephone #: 425-4353
Fax #: 425-2696

Northlands College - Western Region
Ms. Geraldine Rediron
Literacy Facilitator
P. O. Box 190
Buffalo Narrows, Saskatchewan
S0M 0J0

Telephone #: 235-4540
Fax #: 235-4346

Northlands College - Eastern Region
Literacy Facilitator
Box 400
Creighton, Saskatchewan S0P 0A0

Telephone #: 688-3474
Fax #: 688-7710

North West Regional College
Mr. Edward Merkosky
Literacy Coordinator
521 - 100 Street North
North Battleford, Saskatchewan
S9A 0Z9

Telephone #: 937-5100
Fax #: 445-1575

Palliser Institute - SIAST
Ms. Joyce Stryker
Literacy Coordinator
P. O. Box 1420
Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan S6H 4R4

Telephone #: 694-3434
Fax #: 694-3425

Parkland Regional College
Ms. Debbie Purton/Roshan Hemani
Literacy Coordinators
72 Melrose Avenue
Yorkton, Saskatchewan S3N 1Z2

Telephone #: 728-4471
Fax #: 728-2576

Prairie West Regional College
Ms. Carolyn Poletz
Program Coordinator
Box 622
Rosetown, Saskatchewan SOL 2VO

Telephone #: 948-3363
Fax #: 242-8662

READ Saskatoon
Ms. Sylvia Vicq
Literacy Coordinator
P. O. Box 7888
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 4R6

Telephone #: 652-5448

Regina Open Door Society Inc.
Literacy Coordinator
400 - 1836 Broad Street
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 1X6

Telephone #: 352-3500
Fax #: 757-8166

Regina Public Library
Ms. Gail Douglas Brehm
Director of Community Services
P. O. Box 2311
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3Z5

Telephone #: 777-6013
Fax #: 352-5550

Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
Ms. Pam Birkbeck
West Program Coordinator
103-2709 - 12th Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan S4T 1J3

Telephone #: 924-8575
Fax #: 525-8960

Saskatchewan Literacy Network
Ms. Nayda Veeman
Executive Director
c/o SIAST - Kelsey Campus
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3R5

Telephone #: 653-7178
Fax #: 933-6490

Saskatoon Open Door Society
Literacy Coordinator
311 - 4th Avenue North
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 2L8

Telephone #: 653-4464
Fax #: 653-4404

Service fransaskois d'education des adultes
Ms. Catherine Darvault
Literacy Coordinator
SAC 20
Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan
SOH 1X1

Telephone #: 648-3129
Fax #: 648-2295

Southeast Regional College
Souris Valley Campus
Ms. Nancy Smoliak/Jacquie Lenz
Literacy Coordinators
P. O. Box 880
Weyburn, Saskatchewan S4H 2L1

Telephone #: 848-2515
Fax #: 848-2517

Wascana Institute - SIAST
Ms. Pat Hoffman, Program Head
Academic/Employment Preparation
8th Avenue North Centre
P. O. Box 556
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3A3

Telephone #: 787-1375
Fax #: 787-4109

Woodland Institute - SIAST
Mr. John Foster
Literacy Coordinator
P. O. Box 3003
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
S6V 6G1

Telephone #: 953-5646
Fax #: 953-7099

Literacy Resource Centres

Canada

YUKON
Yukon Literacy Council
206A Hanson Street
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 1Y4
(403) 668-6280

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
Literacy and Adult Education
Government of the NWT
Yellowknife, NWT
(403) 920-3482

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Adult Literacy Contact Centre
622 - 510 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, British Columbia
V6B 1L8
(604) 684-0624

Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development
1483 Douglas Street, 5th Floor
Victoria, British Columbia
V8W 3K4

Library Services
Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture
1250 Quadra Street
Victoria, British Columbia

ALBERTA
Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism
Library Services Branch
16214 - 114 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5M 2Z5
(403) 427-2556

SASKATCHEWAN
Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment
Resource Centre
2220 College Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4P 3V7
(306) 787-5977

Saskatchewan Literacy Network
P. O. Box 1520
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7K 3R5
(306) 653-7178

MANITOBA
Literacy Office
Education and Training
417 - 185 Carleton Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3C 3J1
(204) 945-8347

ONTARIO
Ontario Literacy and Language Training Resource Centre
Metro Toronto Reference Library
789 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 2G8
(416) 393-7162

Centre Franco-Ontarien De Resources En Alphabetisation
533, rue Notre Dame
Sudbury, Ontario
P3C 5L1
(705) 673-7033

QUEBEC

Le Centre De Documentation
En Education Des Adultes
Et La Condition Feminine
1625, rue berri
Boite 340
Montreal, Quebec
H2L 4X4
(514) 844-3674

The Centre for Literacy in
the Schools and Community
Dawson College
3040 Sherbrooke St. W.
Montreal, Quebec
H3Z 1A4
(514) 931-8731 Ext. 1411

Service De L'Alphabetisation
generale des programmes
Ministere de l'Education
1035 rue de la Chevrotiere
Quebec City, Quebec
H1R 5A5

NEW BRUNSWICK

Department of Advanced
Education and Training
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5H1
(506) 453-8230

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Provincial Literacy
Secretariat
c/o Human Resource
Development Division
P. O. Box 2000
Charlottetown, PEI
C1A 7N7
(902) 368-4470

NOVA SCOTIA

Literacy Division
Nova Scotia Deparment of Advanced
Education and Job Training
P. O. Box 2086
Station M
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3B7
(902) 424-7544 Toll Free

NEWFOUNDLAND

Literacy Policy Office
Department of Education
Box 4750
St. John's Newfoundland
A1C 5T7
(709) 576-5906

NATIONAL

International Council for
Adult Education
500 - 720 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2R4
(416) 588-1211

Movement for Canadian Literacy
458 MacLaren Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1R 5K6
(613) 563-2464

National Adult Literacy Database
1460 Oxford Street West
Box 4005
London, Ontario
N5W 5H1
(519) 452-4446